

May 11, 2012

"The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation."
- George Washington

Friends,

This past Monday I had the moving experience of being a part of the Robin Hood Foundation (www.robinhood.org) Veteran's Summit in New York City aboard the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum. With the event still fresh in my mind and the pressing need to administer the finest possible care available to the less than 1% of our nation who stand in the breach to protect the rest of us on a daily basis, I would like to dedicate this week's update to sharing with each of you a few of the details of an event solely dedicated to addressing the unprecedented challenges facing returning veterans and their families.

For a bit of background, Robin Hood's Veterans Initiative was established last year with the raising of \$13.1 million to help veterans and their families living in New York City. In February the organization announced Former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen and SAC Capital Advisors Founder Steven Cohen as Co-Chairs of the Robin Hood Foundation's Veterans Advisory Board (please see the attached link for a wonderful op ed they coauthored last weekend) with Monday's national event coming together in less than three months. In his welcome message to those in attendance on Monday, Robin Hood Executive Director David Saltzman underscored the purpose for the Summit in stating "All of us gathered here today are committed to finding ways to reduce the shockingly high rates of suicide, unemployment and the record number of homeless veterans who have served the nation. Our military men and women deserve better". After meeting so many people from throughout the nation who care passionately about and work tirelessly for our nation's heroes as well as their families, I can assure you that he was completely on the mark with this statement.

The day began with a welcome from Mayor Michael Bloomberg and was followed by a series of roundtable discussions moderated by Tom Brokaw, Katie Couric, Brian Williams, Gail King and Jon Stewart. The panels focused on six topics: Setting the Stage: A Roundtable Discussion; Connecting Veterans to Jobs: Best Practices and What More Needs to Happen; Public/Private Partnerships in Action: A Mayor's Roundtable; Coming Home: Transitioning to Civilian Life; Honoring our Heroes: A Veteran's Story and Back From the Battlefield: The Mental Health Crisis. Although I would like to give each of you an in depth perspective on each of the panels, I believe it may be a bit more effective and less time consuming to share with you just a few of the sobering statistics that highlight how much our veterans need our help at this critical juncture in our nation's history.

- o Currently 1 out of 5 homeless individuals living in New York City is a veteran.
- o As the national unemployment rate continues to hover around 8.1 %, the unemployment rate for our nation's youngest veteran (ages 18-24) continues to remain around a staggering 29%.
- o The suicide rate for our veterans is an alarming 18 per day.
- o Over the next five years, 100,000 men and women will leave military service and transition back into the civilian population.

During his opening remarks, Admiral Mullen made the point that during these politically divisive times, caring for our veterans and their families would seem to be one issue that our nation should be able to come together around. I echoed those sentiments during my afternoon roundtable moderated by NBC Nightly News Anchor Brian Williams while highlighting both our local successes and challenges while

speaking about our community's own national model for veteran's care spearheaded by the efforts of the Augusta Warrior Project (www.augustawarriorproject.org). One of the opening questions I was asked by Mr. Williams was how I would describe the situation if at the local level we had to wait on the federal government to address all of our local veteran's needs to which I answered "bleak" and then went on to share that local communities cannot wait on the federal government to come bail us out on this or any other issue and that we must collaborate and innovate at the local level for our efforts to be truly effective. I also stated my firm belief that to allow organizational or partisan politics to hinder the efforts to care for our nation's veterans was a travesty and that this message needed to be heard by a national audience. In closing, I invited all those in attendance to visit Augusta to learn from what we're doing here as we are not proprietary with our goal being to help veterans on both a local and a national basis. The feedback I've received from those in attendance and from the Robin Hood Foundation has been overwhelmingly positive and it is wonderful to know that what we're doing here is having a positive impact on veteran's care at the national level.

Two of the most impactful moments I had during my trip came near the end of the day. One was listening to Jon Stewart's riveting interview of Medal of Honor Recipient Staff Sergeant Salvatore Giunta. As they talked about the difficulties of coming home from war, Sal made a point to share how difficult it was to go from a structured environment where everyone spoke the same language and always focused on teamwork into a life more filled with uncertainty and less support stating "In the Army, the only time you hear the word 'I' is for someone to say I screwed up to take responsibility for their actions." In a society that all too often seems focused on pointing fingers and placing blame as opposed to joining hands with a focus on proactively solving major issues, Sal's words hit home with me and it was an honor to be there to hear him speak them.

The second came after the event when I was approached by a young veteran named Brendan O'Byrne and his wife Elizabeth. Brendan had been featured in one of the video's aired during the Summit describing his major struggles in transitioning back into civilian life and to see a smile on his face warmed my heart. Brendan went on to tell me that my words meant a tremendous amount to him and that I obviously "got it" with regards to what caring for our veterans really means. He then shared with me that he and Sal are friends and were giving each other high fives during my remarks. Words cannot fully express how much this brief interchange meant to me as hearing these words from Brendan simply made me realize how blessed I am to do what I do.

In closing, please know that we have 66,000 veterans living in our community and that one of the most difficult things we have to do is to find them. If you are a veteran or know one who needs care, please contact the Augusta Warrior Project at (706) 434-1708. Thanks to each of you for all that you do for our community and I hope you all have a great weekend!

Thanks,

Deke